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ABSTRACT

Counselors should be able to increase their effectiveness by appropriate use of social influence strategies; learning to use power bases is a critical need of counselor trainees. One way they can learn to use power bases is by modeling their supervisors in counseling practica. In this study, the effects of faculty supervisors' attitudes on counseling trainees' attitudes toward power bases were examined. Supervisors' and trainees' attitudes were measured using a questionnaire developed by Robyak (1981) for assessing referent, legitimate, and expert power base preferences. During a one-semester counseling practicum, pre/post measures of preference strength were obtained from 50 trainees in 8 supervisory groups. Analysis of variance procedures yielded no significant differences between repeated measures or between groups. Observed trends consistent with desirable use of power bases indicated that trainees were not unduly influenced by their supervisors' preferences. Implications of these results for counselor training programs are discussed, and references are included. (Author/TE)

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Impact of Faculty Supervisors on Counseling Trainees' Attitudes Toward Social Influence Strategies

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Abstract

Counselors should be able to increase their effectiveness by appropriate use of social influence strategies. Thus, learning to use power bases is a critical need of counselor trainees. One way they can learn to use power bases is by modeling their supervisors in counseling practica. In this study, the effects of faculty supervisors' attitudes on counseling trainees' attitudes toward power bases was examined.

Supervisors' and trainees' attitudes were measured using a questionnaire developed by Robyak (1981) for assessing referent, legitimate, and expert power base preferences. During a one-semester counseling practicum, pre/post measures of preference strength were obtained from 50 trainees in 8 supervisory groups. Analysis of variance procedures yielded no significant differences between repeated measures nor between groups. Observed trends consistent with desirable use of power bases indicated that trainees were not unduly influenced by their supervisors' preferences. These results are discussed in terms of their implications for counselor training programs.

Introduction

Supervised counseling experience is broadly accepted as an essential element in the training of counselors (Heppner & Roehlke, 1984; Holloway, 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981; Tracey, Hays, Malone, & Herman, 1988). It is mandated by the standards of such professional groups as the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (1977, 1978) and the American Psychological Association (1980). Despite the importance that supervision historically has been assigned in counselor training, investigation of its effects continues to be identified as a major research need in counseling psychology (Osipow, 1984).

One arena for such research is social influence theory (Dorn, 1985). The extensive literature on counseling as a social influence process draws much of its substance from the theoretical framework of Strong and Matross (1973). This

framework identifies referent, legitimate, and expert power bases as important sources of influence in counseling interviews. Counselors should be able to increase their effectiveness by consciously using strategies that reflect these power bases to influence change in clients. Indeed, developing appropriate use of power bases has been described as a critical component of counseling trainees' practicum experiences (Robyak, Goodyear, Prange, & Donham, 1986).

Robyak (1981) hypothesized that counselors develop idiosyncratic preferences for particular power bases by trial and error rather than by training, and Robyak et al. (1986) suggested that counseling supervisors' preferences may serve as models which trainees adopt inadvertently as their own. Thus, this study was designed to examine the effects of faculty supervisors' preferences for referent, legitimate, and expert power bases on the preferences of trainees for these bases. We hypothesized that preferences for the power bases would change during a one-semester counseling practicum and that observed changes would be in the direction of supervisors' preferences.

Subjects

The participants were counseling trainees enrolled in practica at a university in the mid-South during the spring semesters of 1987 and 1988 and their faculty supervisors. Two of six supervisors participated during both semesters, so trainees actually were supervised in eight groups. Supervisory groups were established by the enrollment procedures of the university. Demographically, both trainees and supervisors were representative of those found in similar school counselor training programs (Christenberry, 1988/1989).

Data were collected from 92 trainees. During the study, however, new state education standards were implemented. The standards specified lower student to counselor ratios in secondary schools and mandated appointment of counselors in all elementary schools. As a result of the anticipated increase in job availability, many trainees were given permission for concurrent practicum enrollments to expedite their training. Because these trainees were subject to the influence of two supervisors simultaneously, relationships between supervisors' and trainees' preferences for the power bases were confounded. Therefore, data collected from these trainees were excluded from the analyses, reducing the number of data sets to 72. Additionally, 22 data sets were discarded because they were incomplete (i.e., missing pretest or posttest) or reflected major response errors (i.e., failure to mark the instrument as instructed), leaving 50 data sets for the analyses.

Procedure

Data were collected using a questionnaire developed by Robyak (1981). In addition to Robyak's original study, this questionnaire (or a slightly modified version) has been used in two subsequent studies (Robyak et al., 1986; Robyak, Goodyear,

& Prange, 1987). These studies established the content validity of the questionnaire; but, no other validity or reliability data have been reported. Despite this limitation, the questionnaire was used in the present study because a review of literature yielded no other instrument designed to measure power base preferences.

Questionnaires were completed by all trainees and supervisors at the initial and final practicum group meetings of each semester. Participants responded by indicating on 10-mm lines the strength of their preferences for three counselor remarks, each representing a source of counselor influence. The lines were anchored at opposite ends with "I would definitely NOT say this" and "I would definitely say this." Participants made a mark (/) on each line at the point representing the degree to which they might make each remark.

Responses were measured and recorded in tenths of millimeters with 0.0 mm representing total disagreement and 10.0 mm representing total agreement. Measures from the 50 retained data sets were analyzed by the one-factor repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure. Separate ANOVAs were calculated for each power base. A priori comparisons using change analysis assessed the relationship between ordered levels of supervisors' and trainees' preferences for each of the power bases.

Results

Research hypotheses were tested using an 8 x 2 (supervisory group x repeated measures) ANOVA for each power base. No significant temporal differences in trainees' preferences for any of the power bases were found. Comparison of the cell means, however, revealed a trend in which preferences for referent power decreased between pretest (M = 6.038) and posttest (M = 5.852). Preferences for legitimate power also decreased between pretest (M = 5.808) and posttest (M = 5.516), but preferences for expert power increased from pretest (M = 5.180) to posttest (M = 5.410).

Likewise, no significant differences occurred among trainees with different supervisors. Nevertheless, the relationship between supervisors' preferences and changes in trainees' preferences was examined with a priori comparisons of cell means ordered by levels of supervisor preference. Expectations were that the strength of trainees' preferences would increase when supervisors' preferences were high and decrease when they were low. Mixed results were obtained in this change analysis.

The expected trend was generally observed for legitimate power. Of the 4 groups whose supervisors had the highest preferences, 3 increased their preferences for this base. Concurrently, 3 of the 4 groups whose supervisors had the lowest preferences decreased their preferences for legitimate power.

The expected trend was only partially observed for expert power. Of the 4 groups whose supervisors had the highest

preferences, 3 increased their preferences for this base, but 3 of the 4 groups whose supervisors had the lowest preferences also increased their preferences for expert power.

The expected trend was not observed for referent power. Of the 4 groups whose supervisors had the highest preferences, 3 actually decreased their preferences for this base. Concurrently, 2 of the 4 groups whose supervisors had the lowest preferences increased their preferences for referent power.

Conclusions

The results provide inconclusive evidence to support the hypotheses. Although trainees' preferences for referent, legitimate, and expert power bases showed some change over time, observed changes were not statistically significant. Furthermore, changes within supervisory groups occurred without sufficient strength or consistency to attribute them to the influence of supervisors' preferences.

Despite the lack of statistical significance from which to attribute changes in trainees' preferences to the influence of their supervisors, differences were noted. Generally, preferences for the referent and legitimate power bases appeared to decrease, whereas preferences for the expert power base appeared to increase. These outcomes are somewhat consistent with the results of previous single-measure studies which yielded differences related to the amount of supervised counseling experience.

The trends in this study are particularly consistent with the results from a study of counseling trainees reported by Robyak et al. (1986). In that study, preferences for referent and legitimate power were inversely related to amount of supervised experience, whereas preferences for expert power and amount of supervised experience were unrelated. Robyak et al. speculated that inexperienced trainees make naive use of referent power and legitimate power. As they gain experience, they become aware of the danger that referent influence may diminish as dissimilarities with the client emerge. Likewise, trainees have decreased need, with experience, for the sense of security provided by the legitimate power base. These speculations seem to be reasonable explanations for our results as well.

Robyak et al. (1986) also speculated that the absence of a relationship between preference for expert power and amount of experience was an artifact of the trainees' lack of actual counseling experience. In contrast, our repeated-measures study may indicate that supervised practicum experience can increase trainees' selection of expert influence strategies.

Given the potential importance of the practicum experience for learning the appropriate use of power bases in counseling, replication and expansion of this study are needed. Although Robyak (1981) suggested that counseling trainees will model the power base preferences of their practicum supervisors, we found no evidence to support this hypothesis. Instead, we found a

weak trend in which trainees increased their preferences for expert power while preferences for referent and legitimate power decreased. These findings, however, must be treated with a great deal of caution. The exclusion of a large number of participants necessitated by changes in enrollment patterns limits the potential generalizability of the results. In addition, recent analysis of the test-retest reliability of the questionnaire used to assess power base preferences has raised questions about the stability of measures obtained with this instrument (Christenberry, Gilliland, & Jones, 1990).

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Appendix

Table 1
Change Analysis of Counseling Trainees' Preferences Ordered by Supervisors' Preferences for Referent Power

Group	SSP*	Trainees		Change
		Pre	Post	
4	9.4	5.620	6.500	+
2	9.1	7.100	6.380	-
7	7.4	7.020	6.040	-
5	7.2	4.757	4.000	-
1	6.0	4.843	5.614	+
3	5.6	6.517	5.250	-
8	4.8	6.300	5.700	-
6	4.4	6.567	7.222	+

SSP* = Strength of Supervisor's Preference

Table 2
Change Analysis of Counseling Trainees' Preferences Ordered by Supervisors' Preferences for Legitimate Power

Group	SSP*	Trainees		Change
		Pre	Post	
4	9.2	4.720	5.520	+
6	9.1	5.611	5.889	+
5	8.9	5.414	5.486	+
8	6.3	6.300	5.583	-
7	4.1	5.060	5.840	+
3	3.8	7.067	6.100	-
2	2.3	5.900	5.540	-
1	1.9	6.200	4.257	-

SSP* = Strength of Supervisor's Preference

Table 3
Change Analysis of Counseling Trainees' Preferences
Ordered by Supervisors' Preferences
for Expert Power

Group	SSP*	Trainees		Change
		Pre	Post	
1	7.7	4.029	5.429	+
8	6.9	8.350	6.050	-
3	6.8	4.667	5.450	+
2	5.3	3.880	4.840	+
6	5.2	4.667	5.044	+
7	4.1	5.820	6.260	+
5	3.4	6.214	5.657	-
4	1.2	3.740	4.600	+

SSP* = Strength of Supervisor's Preference